

BIOGRAPHY OF FRIEDRICH ERNST MELSHEIMER

Compiled by R. H. Arnett, Jr.

The life of Friedrich Ernst Melsheimer is one of obscurity, and poverty. It is also a life story which is little known because of inaccuracies in reporting. In order to clearly understand who the man is we are talking about, we must look first at his geneology.

For this report, I have drawn on the article by Dr. H. A. Hagen published in the Canadian Entomologist, Volume 16, 1884. I have assumed that it is as correct as any now published.

There were three Melsheimers which contributed to our early history of American Entomology. Thomas Say considers them the fathers of Entomology in the United States and I believe one, Friedrich Ernst, to be the first Coleopterist of this country. The elder Melsheimer, Friedrich Valentin (1749-1814) was a minister and was interested in Entomology. He published "A Catalogue of Insects of Pennsylvania" in 1806 which contained a list of 1,363 species of beetles. Upon his death, his eldest son, Johann Friedrich (1780? - 1829) inherited his collection and library. After his death, the second son, Friedrich Ernst Melsheimer (1782-1873) inherited the collection and library.

Apparently Johann Friedrich published nothing on entomology. It is the second son, Friedrich Ernst, which interests us today because of his descriptions of beetles.

Melsheimer was a country physician and lived near Dover, 14 miles north of Hanover, Pa. Dr. Carl Zimmerman visited his house at one time and has the following to say about it: "The house, rudely put together with boards, painted red, stood all alone in the middle of a forest, and looked more like a hut. His wife was at the spinning wheel. The reception was indeed very cordial, and when he heard that his father's book was well known and mentioned in German, English and French works, which he never had dreamt of, he became animated and talked with great interest on entomological matters and books."

Dr. Melsheimer's main contribution was ~~the~~ revision of his father's catalogue. To do this he first very laborously described 431 new species of beetles. Finally the "Catalogue of the described Coleoptera of the U.S.," by Fried. Ernst Melsheimer, M.D. revised by S. S. Haldeman and J. L. LeConte, Washington, 1853, 8vo., pp. 174, was published by the Smithsonian Institute. The revision had necessitated a long delay after the delivery of the manuscript. This was the first catalogue of beetles of the new world.

When Dr. Melsheimer was 84, he sold his collection to Prof. L. Agassiz. The collection had preserved in it the only authentic types of many of Say's species. At the time of the sale, Prof. Agassiz invited LeConte to take over into his collection all of the types from Melsheimer's collection. These latter went to the M.C.Z. with the LeConte collection. It was contained in 41 home-made wooden boxes and sold for \$ 150. In all there were 4,674 species of Coleoptera with 14,075 specimens.

(Cont. bottom p. 28)

RECENT LITERATURE

[Edited by: George E. Ball and Barry D. Valentine, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.]

Mandl, Karl, Die Cicindeliden der Klapperichchen Sud-China Expedition, Zentralblatt für das Gesamtgebiet der Entomologie, 1 Jahr., Heft. 4, pp. 106-109, [1946?]. [Lists 4 genera, 12 species and 1 aberration.]

Meschnigg, Josef, Ein neuer Pterostichus Bon aus Kärnten, *ibid*, 1 Jahr., Heft 1, pp. 3031, fig., [1946?] [Carabidae.]

Ein neuer Oryotus Mill. aus Krain (Col.: Silphidae) carnicolicus sp. n., *ibid*, pp. 78-79, fig., [1946?].

Meyer, Paul, Bembidion studien I., *ibid*, 2 Jahr., Heft 1, pp. 54-56, 1947. [Distribution and new locality records for six species of the genus.]

Schiedl, Dr. Karl E., Bestimmungstabellen der palaearktischen Borkenkäfer, Teil I, *ibid*, 1 Jahr., Heft 1, pp. 1-15 [1946?]. [Keys to the species of the genus Crypturgus with descriptions of each species, distribution records and host plants.]

*ibid*, Part II, Heft II, pp. 50-58. [Covers the genus Blastphagus with keys to the species, descriptions of each, distribution and host plant.]

Nachtrag für Gesamliterature der Borkenkäfer von R. Kleine 1939, *ibid*, Heft 1, pp. 32, Heft II, pp. 63-64, Heft III, pp. 96, Heft IV, pp. 123-128, Heft V-VI, pp. 185-190, 2 Jahr., Heft. I, pp. 63-64, [up through "H"]. [Ipidae and Platypodidae.]

Die Borkenkäfer der baltischen Bernsteins, Jahr. II, Heft I, pp. 12-45, 1947. [Contribution to the morphology and systematics of the Scolytidae and Platypodidae. Descriptions of 4 new genera, and 14 new species. Keys. 24 photographs, 1 drawing.]

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(Cont. from p. 27) Dr. LeConte writes the following obituary of Dr. Melsheimer: "Living an isolated life on his farm, remote from usual lines of travel, dependent almost entirely on letters for the sympathy and counsel of his fellow students, separated from libraries containing the results of modern research, and therefore dependent on the traditional knowledge received from Europe, which constituted in fact most of the intellectual capital of the founders of natural history in the United States, Dr. Melsheimer must be considered as a very remarkable instance of one, who, with very limited opportunities, has worked honestly, to the extent of his abilities, to develop the powers of usefulness which were given him. Modest, unpretending, affectionate to his family, devoted to his friends, industrious to the limit of human usefulness, his death at such an advanced age can only leave, with those who enjoyed his acquaintance, a satisfaction that they have known so good a representative of the purer qualities of humanity."